

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, May 19, 1895, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. HOTEL VENDOME. 1, Place Vendome, Paris, France. Sunday, May 19, 1895. My darling Alec:

It was so nice to get your second letter last night. If only I might dare to expect letters from you often, much of the loneliness of exile would be gone. I wish I knew where you were today. I telegraphed you to Baddeck last night, but it is just as likely that you are in Washington still. I wish you would cable me once a week regularly, it would be a comfort. I wonder what you will think of my cablegram and of our going to the Convent. I am perfectly certain that in this way I shall best fulfil your wish that the children should learn French. At any other school the Americans and English outnumber the French, in fact there are none of the latter there, while in the convent there are two hundred pupils, five only of which are English-speaking. These five again are in different classes and do not come in contact with one another. I have been to a good many places and none seemed encouraging, the rooms were small or dirty, or the quarter was unhealthy or there were English. This convent is on high ground in the best and newest part of Paris, has a very large garden and our rooms look over it and face the south, so we have plenty of sunshine and fresh air which we could get nowhere else. The children it is true will room together, but except at night they will not be together, and all day long they will be learning the best of French from two hundred girls of the best families of France. They will not be subject to convent regulations or have to wear the convent dress and will not sleep in the dormitory. I would rather they did that last as they would hear the chattering of the girls, but there is no room. I go there as boarder and am perfectly free, and it will be an untold comfort to be in the same house with the children, able to assure myself of their welfare from hour to hour. It was asking very much of me to expect me to leave my daughters alone in strange houses, yet I was willing to do it if convinced that it was for the best. I feel however that it was not,

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that it is better for the children to hear French from 200 persons than from two or three. I do not think there can be any danger to their religious belief, because in the first place they will not even see the religious part of the life, being not in the convent, but a boarding house connected with it. The price is the same as for the miserable little pigeon holes we saw in the Latin Quarter, 300 frs. a month each. This includes lessons, singing and piano etc. — two dollars a day. The rooms are not as large as the ones we have here and we have no private parlor, but the situation and outlook are incomparably better. I am going to engage Mlle. Fillipi to take the children sightseeing and I really think you would be satisfied I have done wisely. I am quite sure I have.

We went first to the Convent of the Sacré Coeur where Queen Mercedes of Spain was educated. It is a most beautiful place with a magnificent garden, but they would not take us in for a month or six weeks, saying they did not care for protestants anyway, besides that they could not teach us French in such short time and they would not undertake an incomplete job. Elsie was indignant and 3 wanted to know what business it was of theirs if she did not learn French perfectly. But I admire the answer and the spirit which seemed to underlie it, which I thought indicated the true teacher's feeling that it was not well to attempt a work which could not possibly be well done. However, although the Sacré Coeur is undoubtedly a more fashionable convent than that of L'Assomption, and has a larger and older garden, the situation of the latter is much higher and airier and it is as neat and clean and comfortable as possible. My motive in cabling you was to give you a chance to forbid my carrying out my program if you very strongly objected. I hope you will not, for I shall not know what to do and it is such a weight off my mind to have this beautiful place to go to. It seems to combine so many things I desire and could not get anywhere else or in any other way. Charles would board near the convent and be my escort out of doors as formerly in Florence.

It continues very cold here, grey and windy and we have postponed an intended drive in the Bois de Boulogne in a livery carriage. I have bought a cape for Elsie and I wish you could see how very handsome your daughter looked as she came in this morning from

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church. She never was more beautiful than she is now and probably never will be again. I said I was going to save my money to buy a big grey Normandy cart horse for Beinn Bhreagh. I think now I must have her picture painted instead, if I can save money enough. Don't you think that would be a good idea? Photographs give no idea of her beauty and she really is lovely now. It is a shame to let the perfectness of her bloom pass untold. I will go to the Salon and see if there is any good portrait painter now whose terms are not too high, and let you know. There is no harm inquiring anyhow, especially as I have said and shall say nothing to either child of my wild idea.

I have done nothing but house hunting, consequently I have nothing more to tell you. Mrs. Mauro too, has been spending her days this way and is now three quarters inclined to hurry on to Germany in despair of finding anything here. Marie Duncan spent the evening with us last night. She fell through the skylight a year ago, through three stories on the stone floor and steps of Mr. Puliski's Paris hotel. She never lost consciousness and tried to rise to arrange her skirts but could not. Her head an arm and a leg were broken in several places and the muscles in one knee so torn that they could not be brought together again, so she can not bend it. Otherwise she is all right. She said that before she would allow them to bandage her broken arm, it was the right one, she wrote a few words to her uncle to reassure him. She said she tried to smile cheerfully but it was not easy with a hole in her head and all her bones sticking through her skin. She told her story so brightly and merrily and seemed to feel the worst about the cutting off of her pretty hair. It was she whom Prince Sturbide wanted to marry and he was then still young and rich and handsome. I want to hear some more from you. I love you and your letters make me happy.

Yours, Ever and ever Mabel.